



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge  
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November 22, 2006

To: Interested individuals and organizations:

Thank you for your interest concerning the December 1 and 2, 2006, black bear season on Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). I appreciate you expressing your views regarding the refuge's wildlife resources and the management of the federal lands for which the Service is responsible.

The bear hunt was considered as part of the planning process to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the refuge. The CCP is a 15 year strategy for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife science, conservation, legal mandates and Service policies. This plan also outlines wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public. We provided regular and substantial opportunities for the public to be involved in the development of the CCP. These included, but were not limited to, initial scoping beginning in January 2002, as well as a well-advertised public comment period in the spring of 2006 soliciting input on the draft CCP and documents required under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Each of these steps was accompanied by numerous open public meetings or open houses.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 identifies six priority public uses on National Wildlife Refuges. They are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, interpretation, wildlife photography and environmental education. Congress expressly recognized the legitimacy of hunting on units of the refuge system and directed the Service to facilitate these opportunities when ever they are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. All of these priority public uses were reviewed and considered during the CCP planning process, and the Service has concluded that hunting is compatible with both the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, as well as the purposes for which the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was established.

There were many factors considered when planning the bear hunt. Two studies on the black bears in the Great Dismal Swamp (1988 and 2005) concluded that the bear population is stable, reproductively healthy and at the carrying capacity of the habitat. The hunt was designed within the management recommendations outlined in the 1988 study, in consultation with Virginia

Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, and species experts from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. To ensure that the refuge bear population will remain viable and sustainable, no more than 20 bears will be harvested over a maximum two day period. Additionally, to limit the number of bears taken, to minimize disturbance to other wildlife resources and to eliminate the potential for user conflicts, the bear hunt will occur on less than 20 percent of the refuge. To reduce impacts to breeding sows, the hunt has been scheduled for the late fall. Baiting and the use of chase dogs will be prohibited. These, and other restrictions, will result in a highly regulated hunt that will not adversely impact the bear population at the refuge.

I appreciate your concern for the bear population and your interest in the refuge. The hunt was carefully considered and is an appropriate and compatible use of a National Wildlife Refuge. Please also see the "Frequently Asked Questions" by going back with your browser button to the Hunting page and clicking on the FAQ.

Sincerely,

Suzanne C. Baird  
Refuge Manager